

CITY OF SUNNYVALE
PARKS DIVISION
730-7506

INFORMATIONAL BULLETIN

DUCKS IN NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

The City of Sunnyvale manages several ornamental water features throughout its park and open space system, all of which attract ducks and other waterfowl at certain times of the year.

On the one hand, the ducks are very attractive; they provide visual stimulation, and visitors to the ponds are both entertained and educated by their actions. Children and adults alike find joy in watching a mother duck teach her young to swim, or in observing a duck's behind wriggle above the water as its bill searches for food below. They provide rare opportunities for urban dwellers to observe wildlife in action, and the sight of ducks gliding effortlessly across the water is an especially soothing scene.

From a facility maintenance perspective, however, the ducks are a constant challenge. Their feathers clog pond filters, fountain heads and pumps; their droppings litter sidewalks and pollute the pond, increasing bacteria and algae growth which necessitate periodic cleaning. Still, the Parks Division recognizes and appreciates the value of the ducks, and maintenance practices have been adapted to accommodate their presence.

Unfortunately, the man-made ponds to which the ducks are attracted do not serve them very well. The natural food source in these ponds is limited, and efforts to feed them bread and other processed foods do more harm than good. The sides of the pond are steep and do not allow for easy egress by young chicks, despite the fact that Parks Division staff have created "duck islands" and transfer points to assist them. Cats and dogs are natural enemies of ducks in urban environments, and disease and malnutrition are common.

So while the public derives great satisfaction from watching the ducks "enjoy themselves", it is also not unusual to witness ducks struggling to survive. In fact, wildlife experts suggest that a mother duck is lucky if one chick out of a clutch of six survives. The natural reaction of many people is to want to help the ducks, and Parks Division staff are often asked to provide assistance; yet most of the ducks are mallards, a migratory bird protected by laws enforced by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Tampering with the nest, the eggs, the chicks or the adults is prohibited by law, and as cruel as it may seem at times, the best plan of action is to let Nature take its course.
